

## Helping you to understand an Initial Child Protection Conference

### **What is an Initial Child Protection Conference:**

An Initial Child Protection Conference is a meeting that takes place when Children's Services are worried that a child is or could be at risk of being seriously harmed. At this meeting information about you and your family is shared with relevant professionals to consider your child / children's safety and well-being. As parent or carer, it is important that you come to the Conference and take part in the meeting.

### **Decision to hold an Initial Child Protection Conference:**

The decision to hold an Initial Child Protection Conference is made after the social work team completed an assessment of the concerns and worries that they have. If they are concerned that the risk of harm to the child / children is or can be serious and no other plan will be enough the social work team will ask for an Initial Child Protection Conference to be arranged. This harm or abuse could be emotional, sexual, physical, neglect or even a combination of these.

### **The Conference Chair:**

The Conference will be facilitated by an independent person call the "Chair". The Chair has no management responsibility for your child/children's social worker. The Chair's role is to make sure the meeting runs smoothly and respectfully and that everyone is given the chance to share information, express their views and contribute to safety planning for your family. It is ultimately the role of the Chair, after hearing all the information presented, to decide whether a Child Protection Plan is required for your child/children.

### **Before the Initial Child Protection Conference:**

Your social worker will explain to you the reasons why an Initial Child Protection Conference is being held. The social worker and the professionals working with you, your child or children will all be asked to complete a report for the Conference. The social worker's report will describe your family, the concerns for your family and what is needed to keep your child/children safe. These reports should be shared with you at least 2 working days before the Initial Child Protection Conference.

The Conference Chair will meet with you before the start of the Conference to talk to you about the agenda, to answer any questions you might have about the Conference process and to give you an opportunity to discuss any concerns you might have about the Conference. This could be a Face to Face meeting, a Virtual Meeting or a Telephone Call.

### **The Initial Child Protection Conference:**

You and the professionals attending the Conference will be given the opportunity to discuss:

- The positives in your family
- The things that keep your children safe from harm
- The dangers and risks that make professionals, and you, worried
- The history and that which could complicate matters
- The areas of uncertainty
- The next steps – what to do to ensure that your child or children are not at risk of harm

As a parent / carer, you are invited to attend the Conference and we encourage you to take an active part. You will have an opportunity to give your views on what is being said and to share how things are at home. We know it can be very difficult for you to come to a meeting like this, but you are very important. Members of your family are welcome to attend, or you may bring a friend, supporter or advocate to the conference with you. If you do want to bring someone with you to the meeting please make sure that the Chair is told at least 2 days before the meeting. If you need an interpreter please talk to your social worker before the Conference.

If your child / children are aged 10 or above they can attend the Conference, if it is appropriate and agreed by you as their parent / carer. They can also be supported to share their views with the Conference without attending. They can be supported by an advocate or any other person of their choice.

### **When a parent / carer is asked not to attend a Child Protection Conference:**

There may be certain circumstances where a decision is made not to allow a parent(s) to attend a Conference. This is a very serious step and the final decision about not allowing a parent / carer to attend is made by the Conference Chair. This decision will be reviewed at every Conference. Some of the reasons may include:

- The threat of risk of violence towards another family member or professional attending the Conference (this may be based on information given by the Police)
- Evidence that your child or children may be placed at risk of harm if you attend.
- Evidence that taking part in the Conference may be harmful to your health or well-being.
- Evidence that you are under the influence of drugs / alcohol.

### **Decision Making:**

After everyone at the Conference has been able to share their views the Chair will ask you and the professionals whether your child / children need to have a Child Protection Plan in order to keep them safe. This recommendation is based on the level of risk for the well-being, safety and care of your child / children. If there are concerns but it is agreed that the child / children can be safeguarded without a Child Protection Plan the Conference will agree that a Child in Need Plan should be put in place. The Conference Chair does hold the final decision about the type of plan to be made.

### **The Plan:**

A Child Protection Plan is a list of things that need to happen in order for your child / children to be safe. Some of the actions on the plan will be for you as parent(s) to do and other actions will be for those professionals working with your child or children and your family.

If a Child Protection Plan is put in place a "Core Group" of people, mainly you and the professionals involved with your family, will meet regularly until the next Child Protection Conference takes place. The Core Group meetings take place to make sure you and the professionals working with your family are putting the plan in place and that changes are made to reduce the risk of harm to your child / children.

### **The Review Child Protection Conference:**

The next Conference will be held within three months and then every six months for as long as your child / children need a Child Protection Plan. At every Conference a decision will be made whether a Child Protection Plan is still needed. Your child / children will remain subject to a Child Protection Plan until the decision is made that enough changes have been made and the risk of harm has been reduced. This decision will be reviewed at every Conference.

### **Child in Need Plan:**

If it is agreed that the Child Protection Plan is not needed it is likely that a Child in Need Plan will be put in place for an agreed time. A Child in Need Plan is a list of tasks and actions that need to be put in place to ensure that you and your family still get the support you may need to continue to make any changes needed, or to make sure that the changes you have made stay in place. This plan will be reviewed at regular meetings which includes you and all the professionals involved. These meetings are called Network Meetings.

### **Appeal and Complaints:**

You will be able to give your views about the Child Protection Plan and the decisions made at the Child Protection Conference but we know that parents or family members do not always agree with the views of the professionals or the decisions made at the meeting. If you have reason to be unhappy about the way in which the Conference was held or the decision made at the Conference you are entitled to make a formal complaint. You will be able to discuss your concerns with the social worker or Conference Chair, or their managers, in the first instance, but if you remain unhappy you can use the formal complaints procedure of Redbridge Children Services (<https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/tell-us/tell-us-whats-wrong/tell-us-what-we-did-wrong/>)

### **What if I need more information or independent help?**

Further helpful information is available from your local Citizens Advice Bureau or the Family Rights Group free Advice Line on 0808 801 0366. You could also either consult a solicitor that specialises in working with children or contact the Children's Legal Centre on 0808 802 000.